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[Mental Health Department, Naval Branch Health Clinic, Bahrain: A Little Department with a Big Punch](#)

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What do you get when you put three psychiatric technicians, one substance abuse counselor, two social workers and one psychologist on a small island in between Iran and Saudi Arabia? One busy little department! With over 4,500 beneficiaries on base, 147 tenant commands, and another 15,000 or so service members floating nearby at any given time, the department is devoted to maintaining operational readiness.

I think a lot of the Navy assumes that there is a Navy Hospital in Bahrain. Unfortunately, that is not the case. There is a small outpatient clinic, staffed by 105 of the Navy's finest (87 active duty and 18 civilians), 7 of whom are devoted to mental health. These 7 people provide triage, both emergent and routine mental health evaluations, special duty evaluations, substance abuse screenings and early intervention classes, coordination of substance abuse treatment off island, mental health evacuation coordination for both tenant and operational commands, command outreach, training and focus groups, psychoeducational groups, disaster relief, sexual assault case management, crisis response, and stand duty 24/7 to handle mental health emergencies.

Given the constant and sometimes competing demands, the department is fortunate to have three seasoned psychiatric technicians and a salty parachute rigger turned substance abuse counselor, all with significant deployment and overseas experience. This enables the department to consistently maintain services and connect with the largest proportion of our population, junior enlisted, who for many are out of the country for the first time in their lives and are adjusting to new realities, not only being on their own for the first time, but doing so in a combat zone. Other stressors of Bahrain include the climate, the culture, the proximity from the U.S., and the rigorous operational pace.

Unfortunately, the capabilities of the clinic, the size of the mental health department and our requisite operational focus do not allow for some services that people are used to in the Navy's larger OCONUS facilities. The department is unable to provide long term therapy, offers no substance abuse treatment (only assessment and arrangement for treatment CONUS), has no inpatient mental health unit, lacks local psychiatry resources which sync well with Western mental health concepts, and has no psychiatrist or prescribing psychologist. An important point is that while the Mental Health Department does see spouses of active duty members, there are no pediatric mental health providers in the department. Subsequently, with no pediatric specialists, no child services of any kind are or can be provided by the Mental Health Department.

Currently the department sees active duty U.S. and NATO forces and command-sponsored adult family members. Other beneficiaries in Bahrain are seen on a space available basis but we try to see everyone given the lack of viable mental health referral sources. The department is focused on growing over the next year with a second substance abuse counselor expected this winter. This will be a game changer in that we will be able to offer outpatient alcohol treatment on Bahrain. The department proudly focuses on operational readiness and keeping our beneficiaries in the best health.

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